

## Why should I join the Royal Arch ?

Brethren, I assume you are all aware, that the theme in Craft Masonry relates to the building of King Solomon's magnificent first Temple in Jerusalem, built by Solomon to fulfil that promise made with God by his father King David - "To build me an house and I will establish his throne forever."

In the Three Degrees in Craft, we learn much about the building and its materials of wood, stone and metal which were largely provided by Hiram King of Tyre. The central character in the ritual is of course, Hiram Abiff, the Chief Architect, whose artistic ability and masterly skill in producing the plans and designs required by the large number of workmen engaged on the building is well known to us all. The Temple, which stood for a period of almost 500 years, during which time the country was experiencing

many troubles and changes in fortune forced on them by the surrounding nations.

**As Master Masons** you will learn of the sudden, sad and mysterious disappearance of Hiram Abiff, the eventual discovery of his body in a hastily prepared grave, his subsequent reburial in the Temple according to Hebrew law and the proclamation by King Solomon, that by his untimely death, the secrets of a Master Mason were lost and certain substituted secrets were somewhat hastily adopted, 'until time or circumstances should restore the genuine.' These words, 'should restore the genuine' are obviously clearly informing us that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Degree is not the end of the story, there is more to learn !

**After Solomon's death**, Jerusalem was attacked several times. The city and its magnificent temple were eventually destroyed by Nebuzaradan, Captain of the Guard to

Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, and its inhabitants taken into captivity into Babylon where they remained for 70 years.

In the Exaltation ceremony, we learn how their descendants were eventually permitted to return to Jerusalem. The Persians by this time had attacked and defeated the Babylonians and the Persian King Cyrus announced a decree (show cylinder) allowing the Hebrew exiles to return to their native land, where they found their city and beloved Temple in ruins.

However, in preparing the ground to re-build it, they make an important and extraordinary discovery !

Therefore, to fully complete the Craft story and the moral teachings of Craft Masonry, it is absolutely essential to join the Royal Arch, where you will discover 'that which was lost' in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Degree, is found, somewhat in dramatic form, in a colourful dramatic and most enjoyable

ceremony of Exaltation. In the early days before the Union, membership of the Royal Arch was confined to those who had occupied the Masters Chair and the password to gain admission into the Royal Arch in the days when the current ritual was compiled, was the 'Masters word'.

All this changed at the Union of the two English Grand Lodges in 1813 when the Royal Arch, which was strongly supported by the Antients Grand Lodge was finally accepted as part of the Craft. The Preliminary Declaration in the Book of Constitutions agreed at the Union points the way as it states that: "pure Antient Masonry consists of three degrees and no more, viz., those of Entered Apprentice, the Fellow Craft, and the Master Mason, including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch", indicating that there is more to learn after the 3<sup>rd</sup> Degree, which can only be found by joining the Royal Arch.

Why then does the Declaration read as if the Royal Arch has been added as an afterthought ? To understand this we have to look at the organization before the Union. The two main Grand Lodges at the time - The Original or Premier Grand Lodge of 1717, later and confusingly nicknamed 'The Moderns' and the Grand Lodge of the Antient's of 1752 had one great fundamental difference. The Antient's regarded their Lodge Warrants as sufficient authority not only to work the 3 Craft Degree's but also the Royal Arch and other Degrees in their Craft Lodges, whilst the Moderns were adamant that pure and ancient Freemasonry consisted of 3 Degrees only and no more.

However, it must be said that whilst head office, officially, did not 'officially' accept the Royal Arch, many Moderns Lodges were practicing this popular Order via a Charter of Compact in 1766 and a completely separate organisation, called 'the Grand and Royal

Chapter' so something had to be done. It was generally recognized that for the good of Freemasonry and future progress, it would be the best solution for all if the two Grand Lodges could settle their differences and unite as one.

It took 60 years of negotiation and compromise before an acceptable agreement was reached but eventually it was and the two Grand Lodges became one with the title The United Grand Lodge of England in December 1813 and the Royal Arch was included, although not as a separate Degree, with the 3 Craft Degree's as part of Pure Antient Freemasonry.

What then is the Royal Arch all about ? To recap then. King Solomon's Temple had stood for approximately 500 years before Jerusalem was attacked by the Babylonians, the city and its Temple were destroyed and the inhabitants were taken into exile into Babylon, there to remain for some 70 years. In the Royal Arch,

this story is continued and we learn how, when the descendants of those taken into exile were permitted to return to Jerusalem, a new Temple was erected on the foundations of the former.

The events of that rebuilding form the basis of the ritual of the Royal Arch and the extraordinary discovery which was made by three Master Masons who had been given the task of preparing the ground for the new foundations. Their dramatic discovery fulfilled the promise that those secrets lost with the death of Hiram Abif were regained somewhat in dramatic form.

The Royal Arch ceremony is in three parts. The first part is set in Jerusalem about 520 BC. It is at the time when the descendants of the children of Israel led by Zerubbabel are returning from their Babylonish captivity to find that the city is in ruins and the Temple, erected by King Solomon, completely destroyed.

In the first part of the ceremony the candidate is entrusted with the passwords leading to the Royal Arch and is admitted into the Chapter blindfold, wearing the badge of a Master Mason. He is assisted on this new journey of discovery by the Principal Sojourner (a journeyman mason). In the first instance he arrives at the crown of a vaulted chamber, situated on the site of the ruined temple. Eager to discover its contents, he is symbolically lowered into the vault and is required to take an obligation before proceeding further. After his obligation and on being restored to light the candidate retires from the Chapter.

**On being restored to light**, the candidate will see that the Chapter layout is very different to a Craft Lodge. It is ruled, not by a Master but by three Principals who are seated in the East - In the centre is Zerubbabel, the first principal, whose name means 'God the father in the East'. It was he who led the Jewish people from their



captivity back to Canaan and Jerusalem. On his right is Haggai, the prophet who acted as a Scribe in the Grand Sanhedrin. Seated on Zerubbabel's left is Joshua, whose role is that of the high priest, whose responsibility is to pray for the people and read passages from the VSL at the meetings.

In the second part the Chapter room now represents the Grand Sanhedrin - the Council which sat together to regulate the affairs of the temple and religious life of the Jews. The candidate is re-admitted as one of three Sojourners, members of the tribe of Judah, who having heard that the temple was about to be re-built, offer their assistance with that great and glorious undertaking and are given the menial task of preparing the ground for the foundation of the second temple when a discovery of great importance is made.

The third part is continued in the Grand Sanhedrim. Anxious to communicate the discovery they had made, the Sojourners and candidate enter and give an explanation as to how the hidden vault was re-discovered and the dramatic recovery of its long-lost contents.

The candidate is then symbolically rewarded for his part in re-discovering the long-lost secrets - the VSL and the word of a Master Mason.

The members of a Chapter are referred to as Companions of the Order. We all wear the regalia of the Order (volunteer enters dressed in the Regalia of a Companion) which, as you can see, comprises of a white lambskin Apron with a triangular overlap, around which is an indented border of crimson and purple (or dark blue). In the centre of the flap is a triangle of white silk with a gilt border and within the triangle, the emblem, of three taus, known as the triple tau united, in gilt embroidery. Below the flap are two tassels of gold or metal gilt suspended from

white ribbons. When we eventually become Installed Principals, the white silk behind the triple tau and the white tassels on our aprons are changed to crimson. When we have occupied the three chairs we should, in time, become Provincial or even Grand Officers when the colours behind the triple tau and ribbons are changed from crimson to dark blue.

**We are decorated** with the crimson and purple indented sash or ribbon of the Order. It is worn over the left shoulder not as a sword belt but as a decorative badge of honour such as would be worn by a Knight of the Garter, a court official or the stole of the church priest and deacon which, right back to ancient days, was worn over the left shoulder, "in its mystical signification, represents the Yoke of Christ" a reminder that the Royal Arch was, in its very early days, a Christian Order.

On our exaltation (the term used for our 'initiation' into the Royal Arch), we were rewarded with this jewel which is worn on the left breast. As it is an approved Jewel it can and should also be worn in a Craft Lodge to show that you are a member of this Supreme Degree. The jewel, is worn suspended from a coloured ribbon, the colour of which indicates the progress the wearer has made in the Order. A white ribbon for Companions who have not yet reached any of the three principals chairs, which is changed to a crimson ribbon for those who are or have been installed in any of the three chairs, but have not yet been awarded Provincial Grand Rank. Those who are Provincial or Grand Officers, and who have previously been installed as Principals of the Chapter wear their jewel suspended from a Tri-coloured ribbon of dark blue, crimson and light blue ribbon.

Only by taking the fourth and ultimate step in Craft Masonry by joining the Royal Arch can a Freemason become complete. For a Freemason to take only the three Craft degrees and not join the Royal Arch means his Masonry might be compared with the experience of the man who goes to watch the play - Agatha Christie's *Mousetrap* but leaves ten minutes before the end. In the latter instance he can say he has been to the *Mousetrap* but he doesn't know what it was all about - in the former he can say he is a Freemason but he is missing that piece of the jigsaw that would render him complete.

The history and origin of the Royal Arch is, like several other aspects of Freemasonry, delightfully obscure. During the decades in the 18th century when there were two rival Grand Lodges, the Ancients were far more enthusiastic about and committed to promoting the Royal Arch than were the Moderns. When the two Grand Lodges came together in 1813,

there was a certain amount of compromise and fudging from which emerged the contention that the Royal Arch was the completion of the Third Degree in the Craft. However, revisions made in 2004 have made the position of the Royal Arch much clearer - It is not the completion of the 3rd Degree but the completion of Craft Masonry.

What of the moral issues ? At our Initiation we were taught the importance of our relationships with our fellow men and the principles of universal beneficence and charity. The Second Degree encourages us to concentrate on the intellectual faculty, the secrets of nature and the principles of intellectual truth. In the Third Degree we are made aware of the frailty of life, the importance of the knowledge of ourselves and thus it prepares us for our inevitable destiny. In the Royal Arch we are figuratively resurrected from darkness and despair into light and are thereby we should be

better equipped to consider our relationships with God.

There are 115 Royal Arch Chapters which meet on average 4 times per year in the various centres within this Province and although each used to be attached to a specific Lodge, membership is not limited to members of that Lodge - Any Master Mason of 4 weeks and upwards can join. There is a golden opportunity to extend your cabletow by joining a Chapter in a different locality to your Lodge. Thus, you would not only complete the Craft picture, but make many new Masonic friends along the way. As Royal Arch Chapters generally only meet 4 times per year the subscriptions are much less than those of a Lodge.

**Perhaps now you can** appreciate the importance of continuing your Craft education beyond the 3rd Degree. By becoming a member of the Royal Arch, you will learn that 'that which was

lost', was indeed, not the end of the story. The word of a Master Mason was found, albeit several hundred years later and by its rediscovery, the Craft story and its moral teachings are fully completed.

Brethren, the Royal Arch is a wonderful, colourful, inspiring, enlightening and most enjoyable Order, which is an essential requirement in understanding the full meaning of Craft Masonry. I commend it to you and ask you to give it your earnest attention and perhaps fulfill that promise made at your initiation - To make a daily advancement in **Masonic knowledge**

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